

Joint-Statement

Civil Society Organizations Calls for Immediate Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Myanmar

15 April 2020

We, the undersigned civil society organizations and individual call for the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Myanmar and for the State to comply with its obligations under the Geneva Conventions and UN Security Council Resolutions 1265, 1296 and 1325. The current targeting of innocent civilians in the conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military amounts to war crimes and must immediately cease.

The conflict between the Myanmar military and the AA has displaced up to 150,000 people in Rakhine and Chin States since 2018 and its impacts are being felt most keenly by innocent civilians. In the past 30 days alone, 28 villagers in Chin State, have sadly died as a result of the conflict. The Myanmar military has been deliberately targeting civilians through the use of airstrikes from fighter jets. On 7 April 2020, airstrikes on the village of Hnang Chaung Village, Paletwa Township, in Chin State by two Myanmar military fighter jets killed seven people, injuring eight more and burning several houses to the ground. Among the victims were two children, a mother and a baby. This was the second airstrike within one week, as more civilians were injured during an attack on Bawngwa Village on 31 March. Last month, on 14 and 15 of March, multiple attacks on several villages in Paletwa Township killed 21 civilians, again including children.

These attacks have been conducted with total disregard for civilian life and would constitute indiscriminate attacks or even direct targeting of civilian population. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions specifically prohibits “violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds” of civilians and persons *hors de combat*. In addition, “wilful killing” of protected persons is listed as a grave breach under all four Geneva Conventions, which Myanmar ratified in 1992. Thus, targeting innocent civilians, such as the airstrikes on villages in Paletwa Township, can be considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law and customs, which constitutes as war crimes under the Rome Statue.

Furthermore, UN Security Resolutions 1265 and 1296 addresses the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Resolution 1265 “Strongly condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict as well as attacks on objects protected under international law, and calls on all parties to put an end to such practices” while also emphasizing “the responsibility of States to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law.”

Additionally, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, “Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.” This is especially salient in the case of Myanmar, which has repeatedly used sexual violence in armed conflict for decades. Related to this the Joint Communique that the Myanmar government and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict signed in December 2018 has not been brought to women from the conflict affected areas for consultation while the ongoing sexual and gender-based violence committed by the Myanmar military in ethnic areas flies in

the face of any supposed commitment of the government in signing such Joint Communique with the UN's SRSG's office in the first place.

Finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Myanmar has ratified, recognizes "that every child has an inherent right to life" and Myanmar must ensure to the "maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." As a state party to the Geneva Conventions and the CRC, and as a UN member state, Myanmar has an obligation to comply with these instruments of international law.

Meanwhile, the Association of Southeast Asian Nation's (ASEAN) reluctance to become substantively involved is a missed opportunity for the block to play a key role in resolving the increasing escalation of violence. Rather than standing idly by and endorsing the narrative of the Myanmar government, ASEAN can seek to couple its humanitarian initiatives with engaging the government in addressing root causes of violence, while utilizing their good offices to seek a solution to the ongoing violence that is affecting countries beyond the borders of Myanmar.

As the whole world is taking measures to protect against the coronavirus pandemic, the targeting of innocent civilians in southern Chin State, through the use of airstrikes and other military operations, is causing tragic and unnecessary loss that amount to war crimes. It must end immediately. These war crimes are a blatant contravention to the Geneva Conventions and are destroying communities. We urge the immediate end to all attacks that target civilians and to protect the lives of innocent people.

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Signed by:

1. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), Cambodia
2. ALTSEAN-Burma
3. Asian Resource Foundation (ARF), Thailand
4. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
5. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
6. ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
7. Association of Women for Awareness and Motivation (AWAM), Pakistan
8. AwazCDS-Pakistan
9. Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha, (MASUM), India
10. Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (Balaod Mindanaw), the Philippines
11. Bodhigram, India
12. Burma Campaign UK (BCUK)
13. Bytes For All, Pakistan
14. Cambodian Civil Society Partnership (CCSP), Cambodia
15. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodia
16. Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia

17. Centre for Communication and Development Studies (CCDS), India
18. Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Uganda
19. Center for Peace Education-Miriam College, the Philippines
20. Civil and Human Rights Network (CSHRN), Afghanistan
21. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)
22. Civil Rights Defenders (CRD)
23. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA), Cambodia
24. Covenants Watch, Taiwan
25. Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC), Thailand
26. Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR), India
27. Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal
28. Desaparecidos, the Philippines
29. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
30. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-Southeast
31. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-North America
32. Globe International Center (GIC), Mongolia
33. GZO Peace Institute, Philippines
34. HAK Association, Timor Leste
35. Hustisya, Philippines
36. IM Center for Peace and Dialogue, Indonesia
37. Info-Birmanie, France
38. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka
39. Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), Philippines
40. JANANEETHI, India
41. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Roma, Italia
42. Karapatan Alliance Philippines
43. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (KIBHR)
44. KontraS (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence), Indonesia
45. Korean House for International Solidarity
46. Legal Aid Foundation Indonesia
47. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)
48. The Mekong Butterfly, Thailand
49. MONFEMNET National Network, Mongolia
50. Odhikar, Bangladesh
51. Oyu Tolgoi Watch, Mongolia
52. Pax Christi Pilipinas, the Philippines
53. People's Watch, India
54. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
55. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
56. Public Association "Dignity", Kazakhstan
57. Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia
58. People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India
59. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
60. Research and Education for Peace, Universiti Sains Malaysia (REPUSM), Malaysia
61. Recourse, Netherlands
62. Right to Life Human Rights Centre, Sri Lanka
63. Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia

64. Samahan ng Ex-detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (Society of Ex-Detainees against Detention and Arrests in the Philippines)
65. South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM)
66. Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN), Malaysia
67. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia
68. Swedish Burma Committee (SBC), Sweden
69. Tanggol Bayi (Defend Women), Philippines
70. Think Center, Singapore
71. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
72. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)
73. Witness Radio Organisation, Uganda
74. Youth for Peace (YFP), Cambodia
75. Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD), Burma/Myanmar
76. Athan – Freedom of Expression Activist Organization, Burma/Myanmar
77. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), Burma/Myanmar
78. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP), Burma/Myanmar
79. Australia Chin Federation (ACF)
80. Burmese Women’s Union (BWU), Burma/Myanmar
81. Center of Development and Ethnic Studies (CDES), Burma/Myanmar
82. Chin American Association (CAA)
83. Chin Christian Council in Australia (CCCA)
84. Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), Burma/Myanmar
85. Chin Youth Organization of North America (CYONA)
86. Chinbridge Institute (CI), Burma/Myanmar
87. Chin Community in Norway (CCN)
88. Chin Community of Indiana (CCI), USA
89. Central Chin Youth Organization (CCYO), Burma/Myanmar
90. Chin Civil Society Network (CCSN), Burma/Myanmar
91. Chin Literature and Culture Committee (Universities - Yangon), Burma/Myanmar
92. Chin Refugee Committee (Delhi), India
93. Chin Student Union, Burma/Myanmar
94. Chin Community in Denmark (CCDK)
95. Chin Women Organization (Hakha), Burma/Myanmar
96. Cherry Foundation (Yangon), Burma/Myanmar
97. Equality Myanmar (EQMM), Burma/Myanmar
98. Future Light Center (FLC), Burma/Myanmar
99. Genuine People’s Servants (GPS), Burma/Myanmar
100. Generation Wave (GW), Burma/Myanmar
101. Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), Burma/Myanmar
102. Human Rights Educators Network (HREN), Burma/Myanmar
103. Independent Chin Communities (ICC), Malaysia
104. Indigenous Peoples' Partnership (IPP), Burma/Myanmar
105. Karen Women's Organization (KWO), Burma/Myanmar
106. Karenni Human Rights Group (KnHRG), Burma/Myanmar
107. Karenni Legal and Human Rights Center (KnLHRC), Burma/Myanmar
108. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Burma/Myanmar
109. Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (KWAT), Burma/Myanmar
110. Loka Ahlinn (Social Development Network), Burma/Myanmar

111. Khumi Affairs Coordination Council (KACC), Burma/Myanmar
112. Kounj Jor Shan Refugee Camp (KJSRC), Burma/Myanmar
113. Metta Campaign - Mandalay, Burma/Myanmar
114. Myanmar Human Rights Alliance Network (MHRAN), Burma/Myanmar
115. Myanmar People Alliance (Shan State) (MPA-SS), Burma/Myanmar
116. Myanmar Cultural Research Society (MCRS), Burma/Myanmar
117. Peace & Development Center (Meikhtila), Burma/Myanmar
118. Progressive Voice (PV), Burma/Myanmar
119. Reliable Organization, Burma/Myanmar
120. Synergy (Social Harmony Organization), Burma/Myanmar
121. Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO), Burma/Myanmar
122. The Seagull: Human Rights, Peace & Development, Burma/Myanmar
123. Women Peace Network (WPN), Burma/Myanmar
124. Women's League of Burma (WLB), Burma/Myanmar
125. White Marker Group, Burma/Myanmar
126. Yangon Youth Network (YYN), Burma/Myanmar
127. Youth Corner (YC Hakha), Burma/Myanmar
128. ရွှေခြံမြေကွန်ရက်၊ ကွမ်းခြံကုန်း ၊ ရန်ကုန်တိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar
129. လူ့အခွင့်အရေးကာကွယ်မြှင့်တင်ရေးကွန်ရက်၊ ချောက်မြို့နယ်၊ မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar
130. အလုပ်သမားအဖွဲ့ဖွဲ့စည်းပေါ်ပေါက်ရေးနှင့် အမျိုးသမီးအခွင့်အရေးအသိပညာပေးရေး ပဲခူးကွန်ရက်၊
ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar
131. တောင်သူလယ်သမားများနှင့် ရေလုပ်သားများ အကျိုးစီးပွားကာကွယ်စောင့်ရှောက်ရေး
ကွန်ရက်၊ မြစ်ကျိုးတိုက်နယ်၊ ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar
132. ဥသျှစ်ပင် လူငယ်ကွန်ရက်၊ ဥသျှစ်ပင်မြို့နယ်၊ ပန်းတောင်းမြို့နယ်၊ ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar
133. တောင်သူလယ်သမားများဥပဒေအထောက်အကူပြု ကွန်ရက် (PLAN-A) ၊ မြောက်ဦးမြို့နယ်၊ ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်၊
Burma/Myanmar
134. မွန်လူငယ်ကွန်ရက်၊ ရေးလမိုင်း၊ မွန်ပြည်နယ်၊ Burma/Myanmar
135. လူမှုဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေးနှင့် ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးကွန်ရက်၊ ပေါင်မြို့နယ်၊ မွန်ပြည်နယ်၊ Burma/Myanmar
136. Ramkhye - ရမ်းခေး မြစ်ကြီးနား ကွန်ရက်၊ မြစ်ကြီးနား၊ ကချင်ပြည်နယ်၊ Burma/Myanmar
137. Justice Drum ကွန်ရက်၊ ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်တောင်ပိုင်း၊ Burma/Myanmar
138. ရပ်ရွာငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးနှင့်ဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေးရှေ့ဆောင်အဖွဲ့ (Area Peace and Development Forward) ကလေး မြို့နယ်၊
ကလေး ခရိုင်၊ စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်း၊ Burma/Myanmar
139. ဒို့လယ်ယာ ကွန်ရက်၊ အင်္ဂပူမြို့နယ်၊ ဟင်္သာတခရိုင်၊ ဧရာဝတီတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ Burma/Myanmar

Individual:

140. Jim Gomez